

Photoshop

PAINTING A HEROIC MALE

Artist PROFILE

Kekai Kotaki
COUNTRY: US



Born and
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Hawaii, Kekai
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DVD Assets

The files you need
are on your DVD in
the Kekai Kotaki folder
in Workshops.

SOFTWARE: Photoshop
CS3 (demo)

By using design elements like armour and pose you can make a character into a hero. **Kekai Kotaki** shows how...

In this workshop I'll describe how I go about painting a heroic male – a counterpart to the female on the cover. I'll go through my entire process from initial sketch and concept to the final painting – and everything in between. The basic premise is fairly simple. Start with an idea and do your best to bring it to life. The tricky part is all that 'in between' stuff. Trying to capture the correct mood is

important, as is making sure the concept comes through in the final piece. Having things get muddy and confusing lessens the impact, especially with a concept as simple as this one, 'Hero fights dragon'.

Here are some things to keep in mind while we go through this workshop. I use Photoshop CS2 with a customised set-up. I use shortcuts that I made for myself to ensure that my workflow is faster for me, but it may or may not work for you. It's



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something to keep in mind, though, as making your own set-up as comfortable as possible seems like a good idea to me. I don't use many layers – I do most of my work on one layer. Also, I don't use many brushes – I tend to use one that I tweak, depending on what I need from it. The other tools I use most often are the Smudge brush and Eraser. I try to keep things as simple as possible... it makes my life much easier. ➡➡



1 Getting started

As you can see in my initial set-up, I only have open the windows that I absolutely need. I then start by sketching out a rough scenario. I already know that I want a hero fighting some sort of monster. I would like it to be a dragon, but at first I prefer to leave things open to different possibilities. I don't start with colour, I like to keep thing monochromatic for as long as possible.



Shortcuts

Stamp visible

Shift+Ctrl+Alt+E
Use this to create a new layer with all your layers combined into one. You do not lose the other layers.

2 Basic blocking out

Here I block out the basic positions for my main points of interest. I have the hero in the foreground while the monster will be looming in the background. I haven't yet decided on the pose for the hero, although I did use the Lasso tool to make a rough selection around him. I copy and paste him into a new layer, where I get to work with one of my favourite tools, Transform Warp. I use it to adjust the shape of the character to fit with the loose composition I have. Note that I've flipped my canvas – I do this often throughout my process.

3 Add atmosphere

All that I've done so far is block in the characters. It's still very black and white and I would like to have some sort of atmosphere in here. To kill the stark white background I use a neat trick I've picked up – I use an old painting of mine. The paintings I use for this method are ones that I haven't finished, but that I save as texture sources. Using them as different Layer Blending Options like Soft Light and Multiply, I can get quick atmosphere and also some basic colour.



PRO SECRETS

Shortcuts

However you work there are bound to be things you do often. Instead of hunting through menus, bind those things to a new shortcut. I flip my canvas horizontally quite often, so now I just hit Ctrl+R to do it. The flip side is that you can unbind keys so that when you accidentally press them nothing happens.

4 What does he look like?

After putting in some basic atmosphere I desaturate the entire piece. I do this to keep things simple. I still have to figure out what the hero looks like, so having fewer things to worry about – like colour – makes it easier for me to concentrate on the character. At this stage I'm not really worried about what the design of the armour is, I'm preoccupied with getting the pose right. I try to capture a moment right before the action. The hero is not yet swinging at something, but he will be in a few seconds.

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5 Monochromatic, texture, lighting

After I sketch out the hero a little bit more I decide to bring some colour back, using the method as seen in step 3. Using an old half-finished painting for different layers also helps me bring in textures to the piece. Now I can kind of see where the main character is I can also begin putting some lighting on him. One trick I like is to use the Dodge tool with its Texture box checked on. This is great for getting metal surfaces quickly, like our hero's armour. Remember, we're fairly early in the process and things can still change.

6 Changes

I don't like how the hero is holding his sword, so I decide to give him a shield and move the sword into one hand. To do this I use the Lasso tool to select the sword, and then copy and paste into a new layer where I Free Transform it into the new position. While I'm doing this I also add more details to the main character. But I don't work on the monster in the background yet, I let him fade away. We'll concentrate on him later.



7 Colour balance cooling down

I use Colour Balance here to quickly put the entire piece into the cool blue range. Up until now the piece was sitting very heavily in the warm range. Doing this change now helps me see the colour changes I will make in the future. I'm also getting a better idea of what the armour is going to look like on the hero. Also note that the monster I drew in the beginning is being lost as I add details to the other areas.

PRO SECRETS

Blending modes

While the Multiply and Overlay modes get a lot of attention, I've learned that the Lighten and Darken Layer Blending modes can be really useful. With Lighten you can paint lighter values into darker ones. Darken works the same except by adding dark on light values. They give great control over the mid range of values between shadow and highlights.



8 Seeing red

Using Overlay and Soft Light Layers I paint in very saturated reds. I do this to better match the colour scheme that I have for the female warrior who this character is related to. You can still see some leftover blues from the previous steps though. I also want to fix the helmet on the hero, as something was bugging me about it. I detail out more of the armour, but I have also lost some details in other places. I'm detached enough to not really love anything too much – if it needs to go, it needs to go. Like the monster in the background, he's almost completely invisible now.

9 Gold armour

I spend some time rendering out the armour to the point where I'm done with him – just a few more tweaks. I've also warmed the entire piece up again, using the Colour Balance, but this time by moving the colour sliders toward the red and yellow sides. I also adjust my Levels. I usually only move the outside ticks inwards a tiny amount. Now let's make a dragon!



Shortcuts Colour balance Ctrl+B

This brings up your Colour Balance menu to quickly change the hue of your shadows, mid-tones and highlights.



11 What a beast!

I paint in most of the dragon. I've also tried to hint at the raging inferno that it has caused in the background, and I've painted in some more smoke and dust in the foreground. This is where I also add textures, which I do in a few ways. The first one is to use a Brush, with the Texture box checked – from here I can add any texture I want. I also use the Eraser tool. I do this with care, and try to achieve a painterly look.

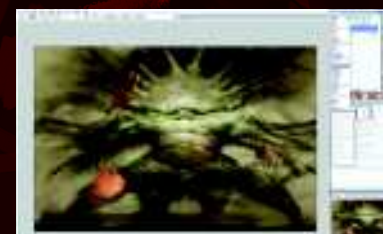
10 Making a monster

Looking at my composition I used most of the space on the hero. I would like to have more room to work on the dragon, so I duplicate the entire layer, and using the Free Transform tool I shrink it down in size. Now remember, I usually only work in one layer. After I erase and paint the areas I don't need in the second layer I will Flatten Image so that I'm back working on one layer again.



12 Adding texture

Another way to add texture is by employing the same principle I used to add atmosphere in the beginning, utilising an old image. The big difference is that when adding atmosphere I use an image with larger gradations whereas for heavy texture I tend to use an image with smaller gradations. A good example is this old creature drawing of mine. I set it to Soft Light on the layer and erase the parts I don't want.



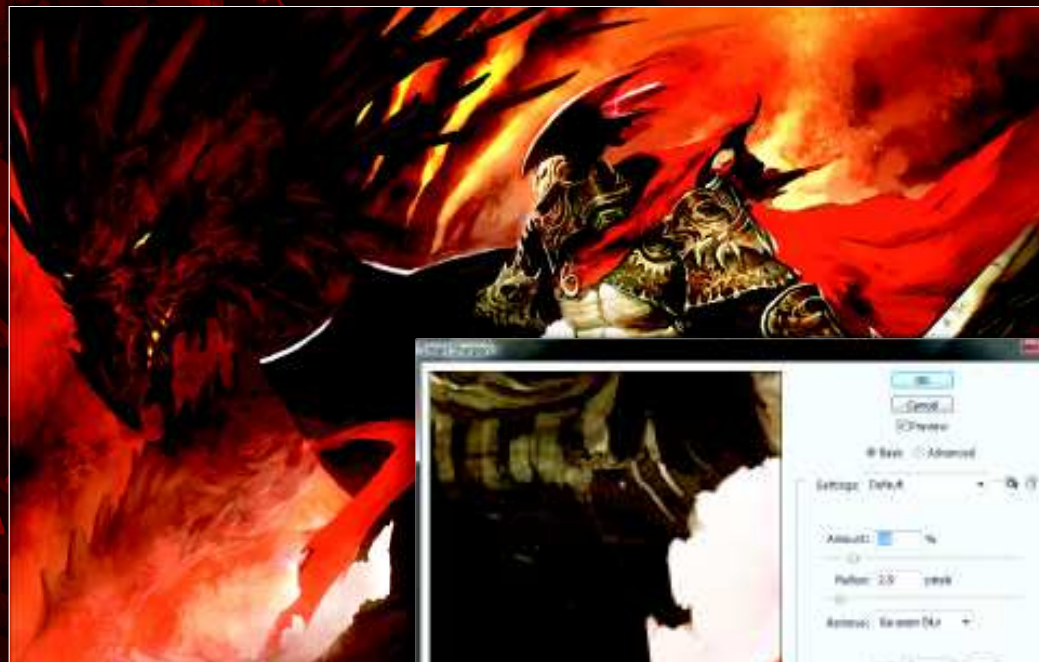
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13 Some final touch-ups

When we're approaching being finished it's a perfect time to step back and assess things. Looking at the dragon in the background I feel that he could use some additional points of interests. I add the spikes to cross the more vertical flame slits to get a more interesting shape. I also add some more details to the back leg of the dragon. This comes in the form of more highlights. Since I feel that this is the way the piece will face, I no longer flip the canvas as often.

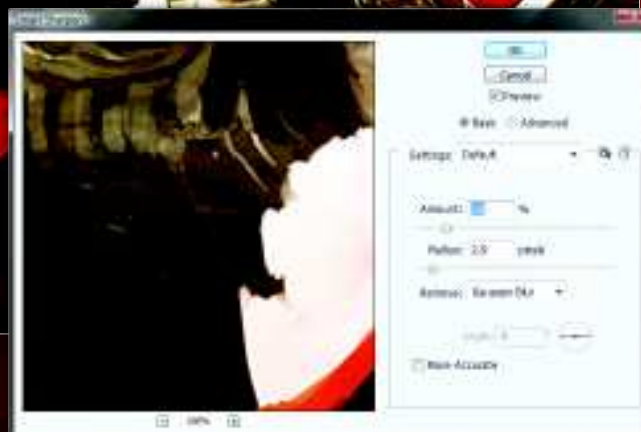
14 Almost done

I'm not going to do any more major painting to the piece, only some very small touch-up work here and there. I still use all the same tricks as before, but as the piece comes to a close they go from being on a macro level to a more micro level. Instead of using a Soft Light layer to colour the entire piece, I use it to brighten a certain spot on the armour. I tweak the Levels very slightly.



15 Sharpening up

One of the things I like to do when I'm finishing up a piece is to use Smart **Sharpen**. Sharpening a piece can help give it that finished look, though I'm careful not to over-sharpen, so my settings are fairly conservative. I do some more minor tweaks – a little bit more red here and a Smudge there – and work like this until I finally call the piece done. ●



Kekai interview

If you've enjoyed this stunning workshop, flick back to page 44 immediately to read our exclusive interview with the great man himself...

WORKSHOP BRUSHES

ON THE DVD

PHOTOSHOP

CUSTOM BRUSH:

I used a Regular and Smudge brush for this workshop, but thought I'd share my Chain Link brush with you... it's on the DVD.

BRUSH TIP SHAPE

Spacing: 137 per cent

Diameter: 80 px

SHAPE DYNAMICS

Size jitter

Control: Pen Pressure

Minimum diameter: 53 per cent

OTHER DYNAMICS

Control: Pen Pressure, Airbrush, Smoothing



TURN TO PAGE 44!

